

Taryn Ryan - Placer High School

Early in the morning on an auspicious July day, I piled out of the car after six other high schoolers, equipped in shorts and running shoes. We paused for a moment, taking in the crisp morning air, the low rumble of the river, and the verdant plant life surrounding us, before starting up the trail towards Clementine. I was invigorated by the energy of the canyon, exhilarated as I ran along the well-worn trail behind my teammates. On the return descent, my feet and lungs ached, and the sun beat down, but at the bottom of the trail we found relief in the river, jumping into its refreshing depths with whoops of delight.

I have helped at aid stations for many running and biking races in the canyon, chatting with and cheering on people from all over the world who came to enjoy the marvels of the canyon. When my cousins from Australia arrived for a short visit, the first thing we did was to take them on a hike from Robie Point to Green Gate, proud to showcase the rugged natural beauty that we grew up with.

The canyon has given me a love and appreciation for nature, a space to run, and a connection with my community. It is an integral part of Auburn, being loved and used by many. However, as I learned more about climate change, environmental science, and the American River watershed, I came to understand that it is also a delicate ecosystem threatened by the imminent effects of climate change: shifts in the ranges of flora and fauna, winter flooding, summer droughts, decreased water quality, and unprecedented wildfires.

Mitigating the effects of climate change on the American River canyon will require both local and global awareness and action - a formidable task. Through my leadership position in Politics Club at Placer, I try to bring awareness of these issues to my fellow students, encouraging them to vote with environmental issues in mind and otherwise become active participants in our community. We have held multiple voter registration drives to turn the rhetoric into action. I have participated in environmental marches to further pressure local, state,

and federal authorities to act on climate change and environmental protection. As an individual, I will continue to reduce my carbon footprint by biking instead of driving, recycling, conserving water, buying secondhand clothing, using reusable shopping bags, and eating locally sourced food and less meat.

As I pursue a career in engineering, I will be continually conscious of the environmental impacts of my work, so that any technological advances I contribute to will not come at the expense of the environment. Protecting the American River and its canyons will require halting climate change, and along with countless other endangered wonders, will preserve a pristine natural environment, a fragile and important ecosystem for countless flora and fauna, and a physical and symbolic heart of much of Auburn's civic life.